FOUR : THE SYMBOLISM OF ENTROPY AND DECAY

> *The nature of the psyche reaches into obscurities far beyond the scope of our understanding. It contains as many riddles as the universe with its galactic systems, before whose majestic configurations only a mind lacking in imagination can fail to admit its own insufficiency.*
>
> *C. G. Jung*

The two previous chapters deal with symbols that are associated with positive aspects of human thought and psychic development. They analyse images that are linked to the growth of consciousness, to the assumption of morality, and to the movement towards what, in Jungian terminology, would be called the attainment of individuation. Chapter Two is concerned with these symbols on a personal level, and the books analysed in that chapter deal with the struggle of the individual to achieve personal enlightenment and fulfilment. In Chapter Three, the concept of individual growth is linked to the larger meaning of the protagonist's role within society and culture. Here, the central character moves not only towards personal, psychic evolution, but takes on, also, a redemptive function, becoming, in effect, a messianic facilitator not only of his or her own movement towards wholeness or unity, but also of the movement of society towards redemption. The emphasis in books dealt with in these two chapters is not only on growth, but also on regeneration and renewal.

These two chapters are concerned, then, with movements of integration and progression, with the evolutionary capacity of mankind to achieve oneness or maturity by transcending or surpassing the limits of the purely human and personal. It might indeed be possible to say that they deal with an *enlargement* of the human state. However, certain writers of science fiction have become absorbed by what appears to them to be an urge inherent in

personality and culture to move towards the opposite pole; to move, in other words, in directions that are inward rather than outward, and which seem then to indicate contraction rather than expansion. Writers such as Brian Aldiss and J. G. Ballard, who frequently deal with themes and images of disintegration, devolution, sterility, or entropy, will be considered in this chapter.

'Entropy' has, in fact, become something of a modish term in science fiction writing. A scientific term that relates to thermodynamics, entropy refers to the amount of heat that is contained in a closed system and which is, for all practical purposes, unavailable or wasted energy. Because of this, entropy is often associated with an increase in disorder. The concept has also been applied to the working of the entire universe, which is thus seen as 'running down', slowly but irreversibly.

Sf writers have appropriated this term, seeing it as a useful one that provides a metaphor for all sorts of negative and retrogressive processes. Since society and personality can be regarded as mirroring, in microcosm, the larger cosmic movement, they are then seen to be in a similar state of slow disintegration. Peter Nicholls (1979:198) tentatively suggests that Philip K. Dick may have been the first writer to introduce the concept into sf. Certainly, his works are much concerned with the disintegration and increasing disorder of personality and society, and with the impossibility of defining objective reality. Even in an early novel such as Eye in the Sky (1957), Dick explores the theme of the subjectivity of experiential reality in a plot which has each character experiencing the strange, even paranoid terms in which other characters interpret the world and its events. In later works such as Ubik (1973), this theme is explored again, now linked with the progressive decay and devolution of the real world. Potplants that wither and die in a matter of hours, a

newly-bought newspaper that turns out to be a year old, a brand new tape recorder containing parts that are all worn out - all these are symptoms of the entropy that finally afflicts even the central characters in the novel.

Philip K. Dick's works ask numerous metaphysical questions. They have a grimly humorous, inventive and paranoid quality that is sustained through what appears sometimes to be careless or sketchy writing. Setting and character development are seldom of great interest to Dick, and are of a curiously undefined nature. What emerges clearly in his writing, however, is the simultaneously absurd and nightmarish quality of Dick's own deep-rooted sense of ontological uncertainty. The elusive nature of 'reality' is what underlies the decaying world of Ubik. Joe Chip, the novel's protagonist, experiences this entropic breakdown as a process within himself.

> What he saw now seemed to be a desert of ice from which stark boulders jutted. A wind spewed across the plain which reality had become; the wind congealed into deeper ice, and the boulders disappeared for the most part. And darkness presented itself off at the edges of his vision; he caught only a meagre glimpse of it.
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> But, he thought, this is projection on my part. It isn't the universe which is being entombed by layers of wind, cold, darkness and ice; all this is going on within me, and yet I seem to see it outside.... It must be a manifestation of dying, he said to himself. The uncertainty which I feel, the slowing down into entropy - that's the process....
>
> (Ubik, 1973:107)

Philip K. Dick's profound unease within the world in which he finds himself stands in marked contrast to the pulp origins of his writing style, and testifies to the manner in which science fiction sometimes has the power to rise above undistinguished writing or

confused plotting to create a vision of striking effectiveness. Like Alfred Bester, an incomparably more 'stylish' writer, Philip K. Dick may be seen as a forerunner of a later movement within the sf genre - one which culminated in what has come to be called the New Wave.

New Wave sf is closely associated with New Worlds, a British sf magazine that was edited, during the 1960s and early 1970s, by Michael Moorcock, and which gradually began to publish work that was more exploratory, more experimental in its use of language, style and narrative technique, and generally less concerned with traditional genre sf concerns. At times it has elicited strong resistance and controversy, but the writers associated with New Worlds during this particular period became known as 'New Wave' writers and included J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Ian Watson, Roger Zelazny, Samuel R. Delany and Thomas Disch. These writers eschew the conventional and technology-orientated themes of much traditional sf, as well as its generally 'upbeat' nature. And, although it is something of a simplification to see most sf as optimistic in nature - especially after the events of World War II, the atom bomb and the ensuing 'cold war' that created a vast schism between East and West - the emphasis, even in sf of a grimmer and more apocalyptic nature, was on the ability of mankind to triumph over obstacles, even to rise once more from the shattered ruins created by its own technology.

However, it was the work of New Wave writers that introduced newly ambiguous attitudes and adventurous writing techniques into a genre that had been generally notorious for the use of uncomplicated characterisation, fast-paced action and journalistic writing style. There had, of course, always been writers who transcended the limitations of the genre, and it was perhaps in the 1960s that such trends simply became assimilated into sf

in a more consciously determined manner by writers who began to use exploratory techniques that were already part of mainstream literature. In this sense, as William Sims Bainbridge (1986:90) suggests, the New Wave can probably be seen as the crest of a wave that had been gathering momentum slowly since the 1950s.

New Wave writing has drawn enormous criticism from fans and writers alike for what many see as its 'depressing' and 'nihilistic' attitudes. Stanislaw Lem (1976:26), for instance, has castigated J. G. Ballard for his 'negativism', 'emptiness' and 'irrationality', and for what he regards as a rejection of knowledge. For, unlike less controversial forms of sf which are inclined to celebrate the triumph of rationality and of the human spirit, New Wave writing often 'defends irrationality against the numbing chill of too much logic and against enslavement to the definitions of reality promulgated by bureaucrats and technocrats' (Bainbridge, 1986:99). James Gunn, writing in Science Fiction, Today and Tomorrow, sees the New Wave as a movement by the young away from 'scientific positivism':

> It was a response by young writers to the spirit of the times which was rejecting intellectualism as a blind alley, which demonstrated itself in a resurgence of fantasy, occultism and mysticism and a willingness to sacrifice the universities to end the war in Vietnam, to trade the classroom and the book for the experience, to seek answers in drugs and meditation rather than in study and experiment, to put together new groupings rather than improve old ones.
>
> (Gunn, 1974:207)

It is, therefore, not surprising that much that can be labelled 'subversive' has found a home within the New Wave, such as overtly feminist writing, as well as writing that is critical of conservative political and social attitudes and mores. Furthermore, some New Wave

writers were prepared to take the concept of Darwinian evolution to its logical conclusion. They were unflinching in their acceptance of the notion that humankind would eventually fulfil its evolutionary purpose and would ultimately decay into obsolescence, perhaps even into extinction.[1]

In part, some of the controversy inherent in New Wave is derived from the profoundly ambiguous manner in which many writers began to respond to the invasion of daily life by technology in ways that seemed to manipulate both the external world and the perception of reality. Contrary to the brave expectations of earlier writers, who saw in science the promise of a universal panacea for all mankind's ills, New Wave writers began to experience an uneasy sense that too blind a belief in science might be somewhat naïve.

One writer who has consistently expressed this sense of dis-ease is Brian Aldiss. As has been mentioned previously, Aldiss has been associated at times with New Wave writing, and has also been much concerned with themes of entropy and decay. He has produced, arguably, one of the most sweepingly comprehensive, entertaining and insightful studies of science fiction and fantasy in Trillion Year Spree (1986), and has also made forays into other genres. He is an eclectic writer: poet, essayist, reviewer, critic, writer of mainstream novels, autobiographer and travel writer; he is an accomplished and highly-regarded literary figure.[2]

Aldiss is, rather more than Dick, capable of producing polished and 'literary' prose. His

[1] Interestingly, H. G. Wells, in 1899, prophetically produced a novella called A Story of the Stone Age (1957), which depicts a mordant picture of the human race in decline.

[2] Aldiss has won a Hugo award (1962), a Nebula award (1965), the Ditmar Award for Best Contemporary Writer of Science Fiction (1969), and the British Science Fiction Award (1972).

writing is informed by his own wide reading and his knowledge of literature in general. His sf is varied, displaying a wide range of style and theme. And while he has been strongly attracted to the concept of entropy, his writings approach it in many different ways. In his novel, Hothouse, which appeared originally in 1961 as a serialisation[3] and was published in full the following year in Britain, his imaginative approach has mythic overtones that evoke the archetypal and the symbolic.

The action of Hothouse (1972) is set, as is Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun, on a dying Earth, many millennia hence. Although equally as fantastic as Wolfe's Urth of teeming and monstrous cities and enigmatic technologies, the world that Aldiss creates is very different. It, too, is dominated by a dying sun, but the Earth of Hothouse has ceased to rotate. It is fixed in its orbit in relation to the dying star, which will, in fact, soon 'go nova'. One half of the world is bathed in constant light, the other cloaked in endless darkness. Between these two areas is the Terminator, a bleak twilight region. The Moon has retreated beyond its old orbit and is connected to the Earth by the unimaginably long 'threads' spun by enormous semi-sentient vegetable organisms called Traversers, which travel between the two worlds.[4]

On this senescent planet, human life, too, is devolved, forced to participate in an endless and relentless struggle for survival in the multi-layered growth of the giant banyon tree which covers almost an entire continent. Humans are reduced in size and have taken on

[3] It appeared in the magazine Fantasy and Science Fiction. The series was awarded the Science Fiction Achievement Award, known colloquially as the 'Hugo', in 1962.

[4] The 'science' in Hothouse is decidedly unsound, even to a reader with little knowledge of the subject, and Aldiss has been criticised on this score. However, the novel is yet another example of how sf and fantasy can succeed, despite inconsistencies, if the reader can - as Northrop Frye suggests - enter a state in which one neither believes nor disbelieves.

an adaptive green tinge. Their mental capabilities are shallow, primitive and unreflective. They exist in small groups, infant mortality is high, and the cycle of growth from childhood to adulthood is much accelerated. Strangely enough, in this late afternoon of earth's life, as all processes wear down and decay, there is a paradoxical flurry of monstrous vegetable and insect growth, a paroxysm of terminal activity.

It is in the creation of this dying world that Aldiss invokes an archetypal image with many resonances. From the opening lines, the world of rampant growth is strongly delineated. This is a vegetable world where life has become motile, malevolent, and magnified to a gigantic scale. It is a world that is, despite its fecundity and its greenness, rabid and ravenous. It is partly in this paradox that the archetypal image resides, and it is this paradox, also, that lies at the heart of much of Aldiss's work.

In the preceding chapter, attention was drawn to the image of the natural world as the Great Mother, the nurturing and feminine principle that creates and nurtures life. But the Great Mother archetype has, simultaneously, a negative and terrible aspect which is present in the mythologies of most cultures. Like all symbols, she is multivalent and has a plurality of meanings, for no symbol can be confined or constricted into one monolithic meaning. It is the fluidity of symbols that constitutes their unique mystery and beauty. As Jung says in his essay on 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype':

> No archetype can be reduced to a simple formula. It is a vessel which we can never empty and never fill. It...requires interpreting ever anew. The archetypes are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually.
>
> (1991f:153)

The archetypal image of the Great Mother - Gaia in her benevolent manifestations - is as polymorphic as all other symbols. She is the giver of life and the source of warmth. Her bounty nourishes and provides. Fertility and growth are her components. But, since '...in a profound way life and birth are always bound up with death and destruction' (Erich Neumann, 1955:153), she has a demonic side as well. Janus-like, she is two-faced. As well as giving, she also withholds. She may cause hunger, thirst and cold. She may cease to protect and nurture. She gives not only life, but also death. She devours and makes captive. She brings, as well as extinction, pain, sickness and madness. She is associated with all that is secretive and hidden, with anything that devours, seduces or poisons. In Neumann's words:

> ...the womb of the earth becomes the deadly devouring maw of the underworld, and beside the fecundated womb and the protecting cave of earth and mountain gapes the abyss of hell, the dark hole of the depths, the devouring womb of the grave and of death, of darkness without light, of nothingness.
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> (1955:149)

Aldiss's world displays some of the protective and maternal attributes of the Great Mother, but possesses also, in large measure, those negative characteristics which create a compelling and ambiguous image of a dying planet. In Hothouse, the fecundity of the Earth has provided the great banyon tree which shelters Lily-yo and her kind. Yet, simultaneously, it produces half-sentient and motile forms of vegetable life that are predatory and carnivorous. In these forms, the female principle is turned from nurturing to destruction and terror. In fact, almost the entire world of Aldiss's creation seems to be one voracious maw, for here Mother Nature is well-armed with tooth and claw - and she is more than ready to use both.

Aldiss evokes this malevolent vegetal life by using a host of descriptively witty and onomatopoeic names: life takes fantastic and endlessly inventive form in the dripperlips, leapycreepers, killerwillows, whistlethistles, trappersnappers, crocksocks, greenguts, thinpins. The mindless rapacity of life in this dying phase of the Earth is clear from the opening incident of the book, when the child, Clat, falls into a patch of nettlemoss.

> ...Clat lay on her back, watching them come, hoping to herself. She was still looking up when the green teeth sprouted through the leaf all about her.
>
> 'Jump, Clat!' Lily-yo cried.
>
> The child had time to scramble to her knees. Vegetable predators are not as fast as humans. Then the green teeth snapped shut about her waist.
>
> Under the leaf, a trappersnapper had moved into position, sensing the presence of prey through the single layer of foliage. The trappersnapper was a horny, caselike affair, just a pair of square jaws, hinged and with many long teeth. From one corner of it grew a stalk, very muscular and thicker than a human, and resembling a neck. Now it bent, carrying Clat away to its true mouth, which lived with the rest of the plant far below on the unseen forest Ground, in darkness and decay.
>
> (Hothouse, 8 - 9)

The world of Aldiss's Hothouse has its visual analogy in Hieronymous Bosch's 'The Garden of Earthly Delights', with its fantastically beautiful, yet grotesque, vegetable and animal creations amongst which tiny human forms sport or are tortured. For Aldiss's devolved humans seem relatively innocent and childlike, making comparisons with the Edenic green and paradisaic world inevitable.

Mircea Eliade (1974) has written at some length on the universality of the archetypal image of the paradisaic world, in which man can live close to nature, freed from labour and sin. He points out that this powerful image exists in all cultures, even in those primitive societies which are regarded by Western civilisation as uncorrupted. The 'noble savage' of the eighteenth-century imagination, too, had his vision of the 'fall' from grace. And even African myth relates to the 'primordial paradisaic epoch'. He maintains:

> At the *commencement* as at the *end* of the religious history of humanity, we find again the same nostalgia for Paradise. If we take account of the fact that this nostalgia for Paradise was similarly discernible in the general religious conduct of men in the archaic societies, we are justified in supposing that the mythical remembrances of a non-historical happiness has haunted humanity from the moment when man first became aware of his situation in the Cosmos.
>
> (1974:69)

Aldiss has, therefore, in the world of Hothouse, fortuitously created a multi-valenced image, with many symbolic resonances to which the reader may respond. However, despite the multiplicity of associations that are called forth by his images, the uniting theme is one of devolution and entropy. Nature, despite its manic activity, its frenzied and rapacious growth, is actually devolving, growing itself to a standstill, as it were, rather like a cancerous growth proliferating wildly until it kills the host on which it feeds. The intelligent fungus, the morel, tells the humans:

> We live in a world where each generation becomes less and less defined. All life is tending towards the mindless and the infinitesimal: the embryonic speck. So will be fulfilled the processes of the universe.... Under steadily increasing heat, devolutionary processes will accelerate.
>
> (204)

The ambiguities and dichotomies inherent in Aldiss's world are perhaps metaphors for the writer's own ambivalent attitude towards the morel. The morel opposes, metaphorically speaking, instinctual and emotional life. It symbolises and epitomises pure mind. It is the antithesis of the 'green' world. It exists essentially as an intellect, and must attach itself to a sentient host body in order to effectively utilise its powers of reason. Aldiss sets the morel's intelligence off against the unformed minds of his human protagonists, so that they seem childish and irrational, while the morel's reasonableness has an intellectual virility that is immensely appealing. Initially, after it takes control of Gren and his mate Poyly, it treats them with a certain degree of consideration. Rather like some benevolent dictator, it helps them to survive and shows tolerance for their physical needs. The morel, has in this role, a certain attraction, for it opposes here the mindless rapacity of Nature, which is headed blindly for extinction, and against which the humans have no recourse. The morel then, becomes a symbol of consciousness, decisiveness and mastery over the environment.

Implicit in Hothouse, is the author's ambivalence towards the oppositions created by these two contrasting symbolic concepts; nature and intellect. When Gren becomes intractable and attempts to assert his own will, the morel's benevolence vanishes. It becomes a ruthless taskmaster, brooking no interference in its vaulting ambition to propagate and master an empire. As it takes complete control of Gren, its unwholesome nature is suggested by its appearance.

> ...he fixed her with a dead gaze, then dropped his eyes again. Pallor marked his features, contrasting with the rich livery brown that glistened about his head and throat, framing his face with its sticky folds.
>
> (159)

The terms in which Aldiss evokes the morel would appear to leave the reader in no doubt as to its repellent nature. It is 'pustular', 'cancerous', 'like excrement', or like a 'burnt mess of food'. Finally, he seems to suggest, it is evil, as well.

> He glanced up at her from under the morel with a look she could not recognize as his; it held the fatal mixture of stupidity and cunning that lurks at the bottom of all evil.
>
> (161)

But the morel, which would seem to symbolise the dangers of intellect unbridled by emotion, paradoxically appears to possess positive qualities also. Aldiss never seems to reconcile this conflict satisfactorily, never succeeds in resolving his somewhat Lawrentian dilemma. Despite the perils of possession by the fungus, its mental vigour also offers the humans a chance to escape from the blind alley in which they are trapped. It offers them a chance to leave the dying solar system and to journey outward into space. It offers them the possibility of continuation and evolution into a new form of life.

For, Aldiss makes it clear, his Earth is headed for extinction - as is humanity, if it chooses to bind its own fate to that of the planet. But, curiously, Gren's story reveals Aldiss as deeply ambivalent towards the appeal of the rational. Despite the blandishments of the morel, the indisputability of its arguments, Gren elects not to voyage onward into space with the morel and the mutated humans who have become 'flymen'. Aldiss tells us that 'Nature was the supreme mistress of everything; and in the end it was as if she had laid a curse on her handiwork' (49). Yet, despite this, Gren consigns himself and his family to the dying planet, and to the green world of the giant banyon tree which is, for him, 'home'. His decision is a double renunciation. He refuses the attractions of consuming

intellect and exploration, and refuses, also, the path of continuation. In a sense, Gren aligns himself with the processes of devolution and extinction.

Hothouse is not, perhaps, an unalloyed artistic success. While the ambiguities serve to provide complexity of meaning and to initiate debate, they are also the result of a certain lack of focus in the vision of the writer. Furthermore, there is an occasional clumsiness evident in the structure of the book. In order to impart information to the reader, Aldiss sometimes allows his devolved humans to step out of character momentarily, giving them thoughts and vocabularies that they could not, logically, possess. And the morel, delving into Gren's 'racial memories', comes up with a convoluted version of mankind's past over untold millennia, replete with (spurious) historical detail, that would seem unlikely to be part of the repository of the collective unconscious. Such illogicalities may serve to distract the reader.

Despite such quibbles, the book is a sustained and potent evocation of a truly fantastic world. If there are moments when Aldiss falters - as, perhaps, in the episode in the castle of the termights - his successes are notable. He creates, for instance, the endearing and pathetic tummy-belly men, the vivid and alarming sharp-furs, and the eerily destructive siren-song of the Black Mouth. But it is the image of the giant banyon tree which casts its shadow over the world of Hothouse, for it dominates the book as a potent symbol of the dual aspects of the Great Mother. The morel, too, becomes a powerful symbol, suggesting as it does both the blessings of intellect and the horrors of pure egoism. Aldiss thus manages to invest his dying Earth with terror and mystery, displaying remarkable vigour and imagination in the process and achieving a mythic sweep.

It is, however, in the works of a writer who began to rise to prominence during the 1960s that the concepts of entropy and the subjective nature of perception are given the most poetic and potent expression. Furthermore, since this particular writer works on a level that involves the implicit acceptance of Jung's theory of archetypal symbolism, his works achieve a unique and powerful force.

J. G. Ballard is something of a phenomenon in the world of sf - and, indeed, outside of it. He is much anthologised, much interviewed, much quoted - on radio, television and in print. Highly vocal and articulate, he seems to have few qualms about granting interviews of all kinds, and is quite willing to explicate his writing and the ethos that stimulates it. His work has made the 'jump' from genre to mainstream, and he has been extensively published in both the sf and the traditional format. Two of his novels, Empire of the Sun and Crash (neither of which is sf), have been filmed. His works have been translated into at least ten European languages, biographies have been written about him, and there even exists a JGB NEWS, a newsletter devoted to 'Ballardiana'. As part of sf's New Wave, which flowered in England in the 1960s, Ballard has always been at the forefront of innovatory experimental techniques - sometimes of a certain obscurity.

The writing of J. G. Ballard has not been immune to the fulminations of critics of the New Wave, and it is notable that he has met with strong antagonism within the ranks of sf fandom for his 'depressing' qualities, as well as for the bizarre forms that some of his writing experiments have taken.[5] Whether he is regarded with hostility or approbation, his

[5] It is interesting, however, to note that in his later novels (as, for instance, The Day of Creation (1987), The Kindness of Women (1991) and most recently Rushing to Paradise (1994) - which are, admittedly, not sf - he returns to more conventional, less outré narrative forms, despite the fact that his old obsessions are still much in evidence.

writing arouses strong reactions. All this interest in the man and his writing emanates perhaps, in part, from the intense and intriguingly dreamlike content of his work, which at once baffles and yet seems to make revelation possible. For Ballard's images and concerns all exert a strange fascination. They are instantly recognisable as his own personal obsessions - J. G. Ballard is perhaps the most obsessive of sf writers - yet they also 'feel' to the reader as though they have a larger and more universal significance. They haunt and tug at the edges of the mind. They are vaguely recognisable, and yet simultaneously alien and mysterious, like those melancholy and debris-laden beaches in the paintings of Yves Tanguy, in which the objects that we see seem to speak to some subterranean area of the psyche.

Not surprisingly, Ballard speaks frequently of his debt to painters such as Dali, Delvaux, Ernst and de Chirico, for the overall effect of his prose has a surrealist, 'frozen' quality. Much as the visual images of these surrealist painters seem to dredge up some half-remembered, half-familiar part of the mind, so Ballard's prose evokes a sense of simultaneous recognition and dislocation. Much like the canvases of de Chirico, Ballard's world often evokes emptiness, isolation, and profound silence. Ballard is, indeed, a remarkably 'visual' writer, presenting the reader with vivid scenes that achieve the quality of exotic tableaux transfixed into immobility.

But it is in more than the use of incongruously juxtaposed images that Ballard allies himself to the surrealists. Although Jung appears to have had little, if any, influence on surrealism, it shares with him a belief that man achieves his highest degree of existence when conscious and unconscious flourish together in harmony. 'Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given

the chance of having its way too...' (Jung, 1954:288). He calls this process, simultaneously, 'open conflict and open collaboration.' Surrealism strives, therefore, to unite these two aspects of mind, that is to say, the conscious and the unconscious. Furthermore, it seeks not just to mirror reality, but to expand it. It attempts to force an acknowledgement of the logic inherent in what is the apparently irrational or the illogical. Through its dislocation of common objects, it forces the mind away from tired old associations and connections, thus revealing 'new strata of reality' (Barr, 1946:46). Furthermore, taking its cue from Freud, it also finds fascination in abnormal mental states, which it sees, not as merely pathological, but as providing transcendent insights.[6] Surrealism becomes, in this sense, a source of revelation and wonder.

Like the surrealists, Ballard's writing explores sensations 'beyond the control of reason' (Balakian, 1970:130). Like them, he acknowledges the fact that the exterior world may reach into and penetrate the subjective world. Like them, he seeks the transcendent and mystic moment that goes beyond quotidian reality. And, like them, he seeks this experience without resorting to the vocabulary or experiences of religion. All these aspects, interpreted in his own idiosyncratic manner, impart to his writing its unique, often eccentric, flavour.

In addition, he is an elegant stylist - something of a rarity in sf writing, even amongst the New Wave writers. Ballard produces prose of a highly idiosyncratic and beautiful nature. Unlike other writers, whose style appears to evolve or even to vary, Ballard's 'voice' is

[6] Salvador Dali, for instance, was fascinated by all sorts of bizarre behavioural states - insanity, hysteria, trance, somnambulism, delirium, delusion and dream - in all of which he found new and potent forms of reality.

always unmistakably his own and instantly recognisable, as in this opening passage from his short story, 'Tomorrow is a Million Years'.

> In the evenings the time-winds would blow across the Sea of Dreams, and the silver wreck of the excursion module would loom across the jewelled sand to where Glanville lay in the pavilion by the edge of the reef. During the first week after the crash, when he could barely move his head, he had seen the images of the *Santa Maria* and the *Golden Hind* sailing toward him through the copper sand, the fading light of the sunset illuminating the ornamental casements of the high stern-castles. Later, sitting up in the surgical chair, he had seen the spectral crews of these spectral ships, their dark figures watching him from the quarter-decks. Once, when he could walk again, Glanville went out on to the surface of the lake, his wife guiding his elbow as he hobbled on his stick. Two hundred yards from the module he had suddenly seen an immense ship materialise from the wreck and move through the sand towards them, its square sails lifted by the time-winds.
>
> (1971:33)

This excerpt contains much that is characteristic of Ballard's dream-conjuring prose. The 'Sea of Dreams' has an unreal quality, reminding the reader of the landscape of the moon and recalling the lunar seas, such as the Sea of Tranquillity. The wrecked 'module' reinforces the futuristic and other-worldly associations. The fact that this 'sea' is composed of 'jewelled' sand and that Glanville lies at the edge of a reef, enhances both the associations and the dislocations. The mystery of the time-winds and the spectral ships that glide across the sands adds to the alien nature of this landscape. The reader wonders immediately whether this is reality that Glanville perceives, or whether this is a projection from his own mind.

Familiarity with Ballard's writing makes the reader instantly aware that this exterior landscape will prove to be a metaphor for the interior landscape of Glanville's mind and that, in some way, what he is seeing is a truer version of what is real than that which is apparent reality. Like most of Ballard's protagonists, Glanville is locked into a private process of transformation, of adaptation to a changing set of circumstances. At the dénouement, the reader will realise that Glanville's wife is, in fact, not even present, except as she exists in his mind.

This solitary protagonist is the central figure in most of Ballard's fiction. For Ballard is obsessed by the subjective and ungraspable nature of reality, and his strange geographies often become metaphors for an inner mental landscape. In the process, he creates iconographies that seem at once to be personal to him and that speak also to the mind of the reader on some unquantifiable and subliminal level. In this sense, that is to say, the sense that he is somehow approaching the numinous and the universal, Ballard seems to be plumbing those archetypal images which are the repository of the human unconscious. Jung has explained that the residual archetypal image may become transformed by the particular consciousness through which it is filtered:

> The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes it colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.
>
> (Jung, 1968a:5)

The images that Ballard uses (and which are already present to some extent in the passage quoted above) are ever-recurring and become immediately recognisable to the reader. These are the melancholy and entropic vistas of abandoned hotels filling slowly with desert

sand, the derelict aircraft and motor vehicles, the drained swimming pools, lakes or fountains, the canals and rivers clogged with the detritus of civilization. These persistent images of sterility and decay recall his experiences as a child in Shanghai after the Japanese occupation of the territory, and recall also his own internship in a Japanese civilian Prisoner of War camp between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Given the obsessive nature of these images and of the psychopathological states of mind that he investigates, it is hard not to accept that these experiences were seminal for him and that they left his mind filled with large stores of visual, emotional and intellectual content, upon which he has continued to draw throughout his writing career.

Ballard's concerns are generally with the subjective nature of both reality and time, as well as with the quest of his isolated and disturbed protagonists for some sense of self-fulfilment, and it is in his writing that is concerned with these issues that the sense of archetypal meaning is most directly invoked for the reader. His disturbing settings are most often those in which personality finds an echo for its own entropic dissolution. Unlike the so-called 'disaster novels' of writers such as John Christopher or John Wyndham, Ballard's writing shows little interest in the processes by which a traumatised society attempts to remake itself. He is obsessed, rather, with the submergence of personality. For the fulfilment towards which his characters move often seems deeply ambiguous. If other writers see the theme of transcendence as an outward movement that succeeds in passing beyond the purely personal or human limitations of the self, the Ballardian hero seems to shrink inwards. Whereas, in works discussed in the previous chapters, personality seeks to expand, to surpass the limits of the purely human by moving outward, in Ballard's work personality contracts, collapsing slowly towards some dark inner core. His

protagonists collude in the slow dissolution of their own consciousness towards extinction, often towards death.

His writing speaks relentlessly in symbols and images of decay. In an early novel which dates back to 1962, The Drowned World (1976), Earth has been overwhelmed by natural disaster. Gigantic solar storms have, over a period of time, depleted the Earth's atmosphere, so that it is no longer adequately shielded from solar radiation. As the temperature has risen, the polar ice-caps have gradually begun to melt, leading to vast inundations of cities and continents, the formations of massive deltas, and the alteration of the shapes of the land masses and the seas. The populations of the world have, for the most part, migrated towards the still habitable arctic and antarctic circles. Simultaneously, perhaps as a reaction to the catastrophe, the birth rate has dropped considerably.

The 'hero' of The Drowned World is, as so often in Ballard's fiction, a doctor.[7] Robert Kerans has come with a biological testing and exploration unit to a great abandoned city that is immersed, except for the highest buildings, in a series of lagoons and silt banks. (The reader will learn, only much later, that this submerged city is London.) The flora and fauna of this strange world have begun to mutate, achieving giant and grotesque forms that recall earlier millennia such as the Triassic period. It is a richly luxuriant, moist, exotic and overblown world, filled with both rampant growth and decay. The heat and humidity are so fierce that human life can be lived effectively only in the four or five hours just after dawn.

[7] Ballard himself spent two years studying medicine at King's College, Cambridge.

Kerans is a typical Ballard protagonist. He has isolated himself from the men at the testing station, preferring to live in a suite in one of the grand old hotels that still rises above the waters. Here, the juxtapositioning of the splendour of his surroundings with its 'gilt-legged Louis XV armchair' and the proliferating growth and stench of the external world suggests a commentary on the effeteness and decay of civilization set against the insane growth and vigour of the outer world.

As is often the case in Ballard, the alien outer landscape now begins to be a reflection of Kerans's internal world, of the psychic reality that he is experiencing. He begins to feel a growing sense of dissociation from the 'normal' world, the world that is represented by the biological mapping station. Strange dreams begin to trouble him, and more and more he begins to sense that he is entering a psychological 'zone of transit', in which his psyche is preparing itself for a new and more significant reality. In a sense, for Kerans, time has begun to run backwards as he moves deeper and deeper into a subliminal life, further and further back through the subconscious into the residual, 'spinal' memories that are embedded in both his flesh and his psyche.

Ballard himself accepts wholeheartedly Jung's theory of the 'collective unconscious' and the concept that humanity is genetically programmed to contain patterns of awareness, to contain all the evolutionary material that has made for our survival as a species through the ages. The collective unconscious is not merely an ontogenetic or individual possession or acquisition. It differs fundamentally from what Jung terms the 'personal unconscious'. The images and symbols contained by the collective unconscious are archetypes in the sense that they are 'universal'. They are 'primordial types...that have existed since the remotest times' (Jung, 1968b:5). They are 'archaic' or 'autochthonous', 'of a collective,

universal and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals' (Jung, 1968c:43). Our thought patterns thus evidence archetypal patterns that are phylogenetic; they are the legacy, not just of our individual development, but also of the biological evolution of our species. As Anthony Stevens puts it:

> ...the archetype, as Jung conceived it, is a precondition and coexistent of life itself; its manifestations not only reach upwards to the spiritual heights of religion, art and metaphysics, but also down into the dark realms of organic and inorganic matter.
>
> (1982:29)

Ballard appears unequivocally to agree with this ethological (or biological) approach to human psychology. In his own words:

> I accept the collective unconscious - I don't think its a *mystic* entity, I think its simply that whenever an individual is conceived, a whole set of operating instructions, a set of guidebooks, are meshed together like cards being shuffled. A whole set of unconscious mythologies are nestled and locked into one another to produce this individual, who will then spend the rest of his life evolving and fulfilling that private mythology for himself...
>
> (Interview with Graeme Revell, in Vale and Juno, 1984:45)

And, in talking of The Drowned World to Brendan Hennesy, in the Transatlantic Review (Spring, 1971), Ballard said:

> ...I wanted to look at our racial memory, our whole biological inheritance, the fact that we're all several hundred million years old, as old as the biological kingdoms in our spines, in our brains, in our cellular structure; our very identities reflect untold numbers of decisions made to adapt us to change in our environment, decisions lying behind us in the past like some enormous, largely forgotten journey.
>
> (in Vale and Juno, 1984:164)

The drowned city, thus, becomes a metaphor for those submerged areas of the mind, the drowned areas of the psyche, towards which Kerans begins falteringly to feel his way. For, like all Ballard's protagonists, he acquiesces in the process which moves him further and further into this strange subliminal zone. Instead of resisting, as do other characters in the book, such as Colonel Riggs and Strangman, he embraces gladly the process of transformation. What would appear to be self-immolation in the view of the external and 'normal' world becomes, for Ballard's protagonist, a journey towards a uniquely personal truth and reality. The landscape of lagoons and waterways becomes a projection of Kerans's inner world. As he physically maroons himself in the drowned world by refusing to return with the expedition to Camp Byrd, he chooses also to psychically maroon himself in this primeval and swampy world, the submerged world that mirrors the subconscious areas of the mind. He experiences a re-entry into what Ballard calls 'neuronic time'. The drowned world becomes a metaphor for the drowned mind, a mind travelling backwards in time to a memory of the steamy, oozing jungles of the Triassic era, into the submerged conscious, towards what Dr Bodkin, Kerans's colleague at the testing station, calls 'total biopsychic recall'.

As Kerans moves deeper into 'archeopsychic time', he begins to experience the terrible heat of the monstrous sun as a biological and emotional necessity. When, later in the book, the lagoons are drained by the enigmatic and manic Strangman, Kerans feels dislocated and disoriented. So intense has been Ballard's evocation of the drowned world, its uterine warmth and 'amnionic' waters, that the reader experiences Kerans's own sense of horror as the detritus of the city emerges from the lagoons. Strangman, in 'reclaiming' the city, is symbolically resisting the devolutionary tide, while Kerans now has an imperative need to embrace the drowned world.

Eventually, Kerans abandons the hotel suite and the city. He concludes that these things are vestiges of the past, relics that he clung to out of habit and initial resistance to those archetypal forces that drive him southward into the greater heat and ferocity of the sun. He will, henceforth, be true to his 'unconscious motives', to the need to move deeper into archaeopsychic time - 'into the brighter day of the interior, archaeopsychic sun' (144), the memories of which are encoded in his genetic structure. In truth, he now no longer has a choice, but is driven forward by powerful and relentless imperatives.

Ballard's proliferating and rampant jungles, the steaming lagoons, the harsh white glare of the ferocious sun, are so intensely and visually evoked that the reader is held by their archetypal and primeval nature, which seem to emanate from a rich store of unconscious, yet instantly recognisable, images. Within this wild disorder and growth, the giant spiders and bats, and the grotesquely enlarged crocodiles and iguanas, begin to seem familiar and recognisable, despite their strangeness. The effect is rather like that of a surrealist painting, where the strange forms seem dreamlike, fantastic - yet simultaneously real. Ballard, in fact, draws the same parallel, showing Kerans looking at a painting on the wall of a hotel room in the inundated city - 'one of Max Ernst's self-devouring phantasmagoric jungles screamed silently to itself, like the sump of some insane unconscious' (29). And the jungle, itself, is a potent symbol of the chthonic aspects of human personality, of all those dark and hidden places from which humanity itself springs. Ballard's rank and swampy jungles are at once alluring and frightening. They speak to the reader, together with the submerged roads and buildings of the city, in timeless and universal images of the buried areas of the mind.

Ballard himself seems to agree with Jung that the prime objective of human life is the movement towards fulfilment, what Jung calls 'individuation'.

> My novels and my fiction are of fulfilment. My characters embrace what most people would run miles from... In many cases they embrace death, but that doesn't mean that I am pessimistic. In fact, they find fulfilment. I think that all my fiction is optimistic because it's a fiction of psychic fulfilment.
>
> (Interview with Catherine Bresson, in Vale and Juno, 1984:161)

And the concluding sentence of the book describes Kerans as 'a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun', thus suggesting that Kerans's journey will be regenerative as he moves southward into a new future. Imagery throughout the book suggests that Kerans is changing in radical ways, adapting to the environment, leaving behind what is recognisably 'normal' in order to journey towards some point of psychic self-realisation. When he has the first of his strange dreams, the suggestion is that the metamorphosis is beginning.

> As the great sun drummed nearer, almost filling the sky itself, the dense vegetation along the limestone cliffs was flung back abruptly, to reveal the black and stone-grey heads of enormous Triassic lizards. Strutting forward to the edge of the cliffs, they began to roar together at the sun, the noise gradually mounting until it became indistinguishable from the volcanic pounding of the solar flares. Kerans felt, beating within him like his own pulse, the powerful mesmeric pull of the baying reptiles, and stepped out into the lake, whose waters now seemed an extension of his own blood stream. As the dull pounding rose, he felt the barriers which divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving, and he swam forwards, spreading outwards across the black thudding water... (ellipsis in text)
>
> (69)

In this characteristic piece of Ballardian prose, the sense of yielding, even of dissolution, is marked, as is the ambiguity. For Ballardian self-individuation is a bizarrely inverted

process. If this is fulfilment it is a strange and severely compromised destiny, indeed. David Pringle, in his essay 'The Fourfold Symbolism of J. G. Ballard', claims that The Drowned World describes a 'sombre and ironic' Edenic paradise. 'For all its horrors it does represent a psychological Garden of Eden' (in Vale and Juno, 1984:128). Yet, as Kerans moves southward into the blazing furnace of the new world, it becomes impossible for the reader to believe that anything awaits him but a tragic and terrible death. The horrifying figure of Sergeant Hardman, with his sun-blistered eyes and charred body - a martyr to the glowing torch of the sun - seems the only true portent of what awaits Kerans.

Ballard is superbly successful at evoking what Jung called the 'archaic strata' which lie dormant within the consciousness. He is also unswerving in his commitment to what he himself sees as the 'fulfilment' of his protagonists; that is to say, that moment when they allow themselves to be subsumed by the chthonic aspects of the unconscious. Gregory Stephenson maintains that the 'disaster motif in Ballard's fiction is...grounded, not in a nihilistic wish for extinction, but in the desire for transcendence' (1991:41). Ironically, however, the Ballardian 'hero' has little choice in the matter. He is impelled inward by biological urges so strong that they overwhelm all conscious decision. As Stephenson puts it,

> The protagonists...undergo metamorphosis in the course of which their latent identities are realized, identities whose full elaboration necessitates the relinquishing of the physical temporal conscious self.
>
> (1991:61 - 62)

Despite Stephenson's conviction that the Ballardian hero achieves Jungian individuation, the resolution that he seeks is extremely ambiguous. If completion of the personality leads to the dissolution and extinction of the self, 'fulfilment' of this nature can seem, finally, to be a process of entropy or disintegration. The radical destinies of Ballard's protagonists, despite their special allure, become concentrated into a single and finite aspect of being that supersedes growth and leads to self-obliteration. In a sense, his characters are helpless, mere particles in a cosmic process that is spinning towards completion.

Jung's concept of the movement towards wholeness or unity suggests that individuation occurs only when consciousness and unconsciousness flourish together harmoniously, the one neither dominating or suppressing the other. However, Ballard's characters reach a point where consciousness is overwhelmed by, surrenders completely to the unconscious. His protagonists sacrifice conscious life, slipping blindly into a timeless, primordial zone beyond ego or reason. They give themselves over willingly to the extinction of personality and rationality, seeming to become biological entities at one with the vast, entropic processes of the cosmos. As seductive as are Ballard's landscapes of the mind, the obliteration of his protagonists' conscious lives cannot fail to seem an entropic movement, one which renounces potency and vitality and embraces dissolution. Thus, ironically, although Ballard insists that his protagonists are evolving to meet their new worlds, their transformations may seem more like devolution or dissolution than anything else. Nevertheless, although it is easy to understand why his work has sometimes aroused reactions of antagonism and repulsion, it also cannot be denied that the allure and logic with which Ballard invests this relentless biological imperative is testimony to his power as a writer.

Ballard's images are consistently melancholy and suggest - despite their strangely poetic nature - loss, sterility, desolation, retrogression and waste. In his third novel The Drought (1978), which was first published in 1965, the obsession with his own personal symbols again takes on an apocalyptic and archetypal significance.

Ballard himself is adamant in denying literary influences in his work, but in this 'disaster' novel the influence of T. S. Eliot's poetry seems, unmistakably, to be present. T. S. Eliot, writing in the period between the two World Wars, was singularly prescient in identifying as well as creating images of spiritual and urban decay. Because of the haunting and inescapable power of his symbolic images, many of them have become a sort of cultural residue, absorbed into the modern consciousness, a reservoir from which many literate people draw frequently. The components of his unique iconography, often drawn from archetypal and mythic sources, have become signposts which help to identify the surrealistic, the banal and sometimes the purely ungraspable aspects of modern life. Thus, the detritus of twentieth century urban living, as well as more timeless images drawn from religion, myth and Eliot's awe-inspiring literacy, have provided symbolic images such as the drained pool, the river, the wasted land, the arid desert, the debilitated and aging king, the rose garden, the winding stairway. All of these have become a kind of common currency that speaks, through learned association, to the educated reader. So revitalising, so fecund an influence has he proved, that he has continued to influence artists of all sorts in the decades since his death. Anti-Romantic, often a poet of decay and disintegration, his power is enormous, even by current standards.

Ballard's obsession with themes of decay, fragmentation, disassociation and alienation link him, to some extent, with Eliot. And while it is certainly possible that many artists are not

aware of the debt that they owe to this poet, it is hardly likely that Ballard is unconscious of his influence for, in the case of The Drought, the references seem quite deliberate. For instance, a chapter heading ('The Fire Sermon') recalls the third section of 'The Waste Land' which is similarly titled, and the general imagery (time, drought, the desert, sand, even Ballard's own reference to his landscape as a 'wasteland'), are quite obviously reminiscent not only of 'The Waste Land', but also of elements in the 'Four Quartets' and 'Gerontian'. Like Eliot, Ballard has grasped the iconic significance of these images, and uses them masterfully and idiosyncratically to evoke powerful intuitive responses. Also, the state of mind of Ballard's protagonist is somewhat akin to the emotional and intellectual state articulated by much of Eliot's poetry. Ballard's work, too, speaks of emotional detachment and bewilderment, while simultaneously expressing the intense conviction that there is another kind of reality, a metaphysical one, that lies just beyond reach.

The Drought opens at the point when the Earth suffers under the onset of a global drought. The arid land areas have increased dramatically in size and, simultaneously, global rainfall has ceased. The cause of this distortion of the weather patterns is what Ballard calls an 'act of retribution by the sea' (34). The sea has finally reacted to the vast amounts of industrial waste that have been continuously pumped into it over the past half century by forming a 'skin no thicker than a few atoms, but sufficiently strong to devastate the lands it once irrigated' (34).

As the lakes, rivers and reservoirs slowly and inexorably shrink, altering the contours of the land, society undergoes metamorphosis. The central character, Dr Charles Ransom (another of Ballard's besieged doctor figures), sets off with a small band of companions to reach the coast. There he stays for ten years, an outcast from the puritan beach commu-

nity that ekes out a miserable and insecure existence by distilling precious water on the edge of the retreating ocean. Finally, together with his original companions, he returns inland - to the point from which he started. Like so many journeys in which the psychic element is important, Ransom's journey is circular, suggesting a movement towards some form of self-realisation. But once again, as always in Ballard, this 'self-realisation' is ambiguous and ironic in character, for his protagonist will move more and more deeply into a realm of isolation and entropy.

As is often the case in Ballard's fiction, little seems to happen in terms of real action. Ballard is little interested in the mechanics of a disaster-stricken or ecologically traumatised society. Once again, the disaster becomes a means for him to explore a certain state of mind. As always with Ballard, we are in the realm of 'inner space'. Dr Charles Ransom and the little group of grotesques that is gathered about him exist in a state of emotional suspension. The waste land that surrounds them becomes an extended metaphor for the psychic erosion within. Like the barges and houseboats stranded by the sinking waters of Ballard's slow-draining lakes and rivers, his characters are similarly becalmed in an emotional limbo.

T. S. Eliot has articulated much of our century's sense of meaninglessness, the loss of faith, the rootlessness, the general attrition of emotion and purpose, the fragmentation and decay of society, the reduction even of sex to a joyless activity. Charles Ransom seems to be marooned not only in his own physical waste land, but also in Eliot's 'Waste Land'. At the opening of the book, as he punts himself about the sinking lake, his state of mind - like that of all Ballard's protagonists - is curiously detached. In Eliot's words he is 'waiting

for rain'[8] in more than just the physical sense. To quote Eliot again, he has 'lost his passion'.[9] Ballard's drought-stricken world is the landscape of sterility, his prose is the lyricism of impotence and immobility.

In addition, there is much in the general texture and the allusiveness of Ballard's writing in The Drought that prompt the reader to find resonances that recall 'The Waste Land'. The opening paragraph of the novel irresistibly brings to mind the mood and some of the contents of the 'Fire Sermon' section of the poem, in which the River Thames has lost its grace and beauty, has become a sordid background for momentary and affectless trysts.

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are
> departed.
> Sweet Thames run softly, till I end my song.
> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are
> departed.
>
> ('The Waste Land', 1965: ll. 174 - 182)

Ballard's river similarly displays signs of decay and attrition, and Eliot's 'nymphs' become transposed to the grotesque figure of the Caliban-like Quilter. The writer sets his scene with his usual precision:

> At noon, when Dr Charles Ransom moored his houseboat in the entrance to the river, he saw Quilter, the idiot son of the old woman who lived in the ramshackle barge outside the yacht basin, standing on a spur of ex-

[8] 'Gerontian', l. 2
[9] 'Gerontian', l. 56.

> posed rock on the opposite bank and smiling at the dead birds floating in the water below his feet. The reflection of his swollen head swam like a deformed nimbus among the limp plumage. The caking mud-bank was speckled with pieces of paper and driftwood, and to Ransom the dream-faced figure of Quilter resembled a demented faun strewing himself with leaves as he mourned the lost spirit of the river.
>
> (The Drought, 1978:9)

There are other echoes. T. S. Eliot's poem frequently recalls Shakespeare's The Tempest. So, too, does Ballard's The Drought. The strangely androgenous figure of Richard Lomax recalls an insane Prospero, presiding over his diminutive and shrunken kingdom with erratic and progressively more bizarre behaviour. Lomax's sister, with her air of the 'diseased lily', is called Miranda. Philip Jordan, moving swiftly across the waters of the draining lake, reminds Ransom of Ariel, and the enigmatic and deformed Quilter is referred to by Lomax constantly as 'Caliban'. All these characters become, finally, somewhat totemic; symbolic and prophetic in various ways. And the allusions help to reinforce, within the mind of the reader, the mythic connotations, since the informed reader is aware that The Tempest, too, works within the realm of archetypal meaning and metaphor. Quilter is, for instance, a strangely perverse Caliban. Ballard's Quilter, like Shakespeare's Caliban, seems to suggest the untamed unconscious. Both Caliban and Quilter are monstrous; yet each suggests the vitality of nature. Quilter's fantastic figure, striding about on stilts and bedecked with grotesque finery, is, in some way, the apotheosis of the landscape; a promise, perhaps, of some form of adaptation to the sterile surroundings. His children, with their brachycephalic skulls, their eyes 'full of dreams', also seem to hold some sort of unspoken and enigmatic promise. But where The Tempest seems to suggest a return to the world, towards resolution, reconciliation and closure, Ballard's symbols are profoundly ambiguous and unresolved.

Some of Ballard's most persistently used images, already alluded to earlier, are those entropic images such as the empty lake, the sinking river and the drained swimming pool - all of which suggest loss of energy and purpose. These echo, to some extent, T. S. Eliot's use of exhausted wells, sunken rivers and empty cisterns. The first section of the 'Four Quartets' also uses an image that is almost obsessively present in Ballard's writing - the image of the 'drained pool'.[10] In The Drought these references are not sporadic. These watery connotations are the very matrix within which what might be called the 'psychic action' of the novel occurs. But, unlike the fertile and amniotic waters of The Drowned World, what characterises The Drought is the *absence* of water.

Water, as an age-old and potent symbol of vitality and life, of birth and regeneration, is characteristically absent in this novel. Jung has repeatedly drawn attention to the mutability of the archetypal symbols and their 'manifold meaning': 'They are genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings and in the last resort inexhaustible' (1968:38). Ballard's images often evidence this transformational capacity and, thus, where the 'amnionic' waters of The Drowned World suggest some form of strange rebirth, in The Drought it is the absence of water that is symbolic. The curiously mournful images of sinking rivers and lakes, and of drained swimming pools, give this ancient symbol an oddly 'modern' guise, one that has all the old associations - yet which has also a strangely new aspect to which the contemporary reader reacts on an intuitive level. The symbolism of Ballard's sinking lakes, his slow-draining canals and dry swimming pools is evident. They express loss of vitality, as well as loss of emotional and intellectual potency. Water, with its ebb and flow, is linked to seasonal rhythms and the

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[10] 'Burnt Norton', in Four Quartets, l. 33.

movement of tides. As it drains away, Ransom is 'becalmed in time', unable to come to terms with the past or to accept the future. He 'can connect / Nothing with nothing'.[11] His detachment from the world that surrounds him becomes almost pathological:

> During their journey to the south he had felt an increasing sense of vacuum, as if he was pointlessly following a vestigial instinct that no longer had any real meaning for him. The four people with him were becoming more and more shadowy, residues of themselves as notional as the empty river.
>
> (92)

And later he feels

> ... the sense of isolation in time that he had known when he stood on the deck of the houseboat, looking out at the shrouded objects on the dry bed around him.
>
> (101)

Ransom exists in a state of bodily and emotional isolation on the edge of the sea, belonging to neither of the two communities that are meagrely sustained by the fish and the bitter waters. Here, in a zone that appears frozen, cut off from the ebb and flow of time, Ransom is marooned in a state of immobility. He retains only the remnants of vigour and urgency. He is sundered emotionally and physically from all that surrounds him. Like the monochromatic landscape, his emotions are reduced, colourless.

> Nowhere was there a defined margin between the shore and sea, and the endless shallows formed the only dividing zone, land and water submerged in this grey liquid limbo. At intervals the skeleton of a derelict conveyor emerged from the salt and seemed to point towards the sea, but then, after

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[11] 'The Waste Land', ll. 301 - 302.

> a few hundred yards, sank from sight again. Gradually the pools of water congregated into larger lakes, small creeks formed into continuous channels, but the water never seemed to move. Even after an hour's walk, knee-deep in the dissolving slush, the sea remained as distant as ever...
>
> (109)

This monotonous landscape delicately anatomises Ransom's state of mind. Boundaries are irresolute ('nowhere was there a defined margin'), undefined as Ransom's own mind, and the pools are as 'shallow' as his emotions. Like his own persona, the land and water are 'submerged' in a 'limbo', a state of suspension. And like his vestigial emotions and instincts, the derelict conveyors are simply inert and impotent skeletons, remnants only of their former selves. The water, too, 'never seemed to move'; it is as frozen, as immobile as the protagonist's psyche. Once again, landscape has become a metaphor for mind. Ransom's life is as bleak and monotonous as the dunes; like them, it undulates from day to day, with no emotional variance, no urgency, no sense of meaning.

The second over-riding image of The Drought, and one which is also a persistent symbol in much of Ballard's writing, is that of the desert. Desert imagery is associated symbolically with privation of the body and of the senses, with mortification of the flesh, with purification and the exorcism of desire. Jung calls the desert 'a wild land...an image of spiritual and moral isolation' (1968b:35). As is constant in Ballard's work, the outer landscape of The Drought becomes analogous to the inner world of the psyche. The vast, alien and very beautiful desert of his prose becomes a metaphor for the strangely eroded and affectless life of Dr Charles Ransom. The desert becomes a symbol, in part, of life stripped to essentials - 'a long-dormant skeleton' (151), in Ballard's words.

Yet it is precisely this arid and eroded landscape which is so seductive to the protagonist. From the start he is exhilarated by the transformation of the lake; it appears to him 'like the shores of a dream' (10). Initially, however, he tries to resist it, following - like the rest of the human lemmings - the exodus to the coast. But finally, after ten years, driven by some chthonic and subliminal impulse (like Kerans in The Drowned World), Ransom is impelled to turn from the sea and make his way into the desert and back to the point of his departure. The desert exerts a compulsion on his psyche; it draws him irresistibly on to turn his back finally on the eroded, half-buried town of Mount Royal and then to move ever deeper into the wasteland of sand and dunes. Strangely enough, as he surrenders himself finally and wholly to the power of the bone-white sand and the coruscating light, the terms in which he apprehends the desert are transmuted into images that are usually associated with water, thus suggesting that the inhospitable landscape in which he is immolating himself is his psychic 'home'. And finally, Dr Charles Ransome moves forward into the desert landscape as if into a dream, dissolving like some distant mirage.

> Far away, against the horizon, he could see the rolling waves of the dunes on the lake.... Smoothed by the wind, the white dunes covered the bed like motionless waves.... The height of the dunes steadily increased, and an hour later the crests were almost twenty feet above his head.
>
> (186 - 188)

In using the desert as a symbol of sterility and torment, Ballard is subscribing to a long tradition of both learned and intuitive associations that form in the mind of the reader, and which function on the level of archetype. Once again, however, while the desert imagery is rich in allusion and association, Ballard's vision of it is strikingly idiosyncratic and strangely absorbing. The manner in which his imagery functions on these two levels - that

is to say, on the personal as well as the general level - imparts to his writing a richness of texture and meaning.

Linked to the symbolic desert images are others that reinforce the connections with those themes of sterility and decay that are so prevalent in 'The Waste Land'. T. S. Eliot's poem was much influenced by his fascination with ancient sources that detail the myth of the Fisher King, in which the eponymous ruler is maimed or aged and therefore associated with the dying land, the loss of vegetation and fertility. The various 'voices' which speak in Eliot's 'Waste Land' are affected by the sterility of modern life. Relationships are impoverished, transitory and reduced to only the most residual or neurotic. The overall imagery is wintry, exhausted, mournfully nostalgic for vanished splendour and vitality; the mood is one of waiting for replenishment, for spring, for rain, for rebirth. Ballard's novel recalls these themes, as well as the image of the Fisher King, albeit in somewhat distorted form. For in The Drought rebirth is an ambiguous concept, more akin to the entropic processes of dissolution.

The fishermen, led by the darkly sombre figure of Jonas, to whom Ballard refers several times as the 'fisher captain', seem to take on symbolic aspects. Fishermen are associated with Christian imagery, the disciples of Christ were 'fishers of men'. And Jonas's bos'un is called Saul - yet another Biblical analogy. But Ballard's fishermen have pinched and drawn faces, they have 'the closed expression of a group of strikers or unemployed' (40), and they use force to try to capture and recruit Ransom - thus subverting, negating Christian teaching. The half-mad figure of the fisher captain thus becomes ambiguous. Waiting in a diseased Eden for renewal, Jonas becomes associated with the fertility of water and

fish, and yet inextricably linked also to the dying land. The symbolism of regeneration is thus reversed, becoming the imagery of stasis and decay.

Other images take on an iconographic aspect in The Drought. One of the most prevalent is the symbol of the fish, an ancient image associated with both the phallic principle and also with the uterine waters of the primordial element. Kerenyi mentions that the fish was known to the ancient Greeks as the 'uterine beast' and that they 'revered it above all the denizens of the deep' (1985:50). Fish, like birds, are images of chthonic power, representing birth, fertility and resurrection. Ballard's dying fish, stranded by the ebbing waters of Ballard's world, are thus linked to the sterility of the landscape. Jessie Weston's 1920 work, on which T. S. Eliot drew for much of his knowledge of the Fisher King legend, remarks that '...the Fish [is] a Divine Life symbol, of immemorial antiquity...' (1980:121), and traces its appearance back in time to long before it appeared as a symbol of Christian faith. Again, Ballard's symbolism is ambiguous. For, while in The Drought the fish, dying together with birds and other forms of life, become archetypal symbols of failed fertility, they are also present as symbols of continuing survival and hope. To the community living on the edge of the 'bitter sea', fish are the main source of sustenance and also, together with water, the most important of currencies. In the chapel of the shore settlement

> The port-holes and windows had been replaced by crude stained glass images of biblical scenes, in which some local craftsman had depicted Christ and his disciples surrounded by leaping sharks and sea-horses.
>
> (125)

Yet the fish, ironically, speak also of death and sterility, for they hang dead and mutilated from the rails of the ships:

> ...while an immense swordfish, the proudest catch of the settlement and the Reverend Johnstone's choice of a militant symbol to signify its pride, was tied to the whale-bone mast and hung below the cross, its huge blade pointed heaven-wards.
>
> (125)

The fish symbolism becomes a consistent and unifying theme. When Ransom returns to Mount Royal, he finds the androgenous Lomax (recalling T. S. Eliot's 'old man with wrinkled dugs'[12]), who still retains some power over the strange little community that exists around his reservoir. Once again, the symbolism is ambiguous, for the doomed and perverse Lomax is described in terms that recall the fish images which have begun to suggest both fertility and death.

> He wore a grey silk suit of extravagant cut, the pleated trousers like a close-fitting skirt, or the bifurcated tail of a huge fish...
>
> (174)

Later, the fish imagery is reinforced, for Lomax's 'suit was puffed up, the lapels flaring like the gills of an angry fish' (181). He is a 'demented Prospero', sensing the end of his reign. However, unlike Shakespeare's Prospero, Lomax will come to no new wisdom. If there is a 'sea-change' in The Drought, it is a strange affair, promising dissolution rather than rebirth.

In a story dating from 1960, 'The Voices of Time', Ballard demonstrates his personal interpretation of the imagery of fulfilment or completion. He uses an archetypal Jungian symbol - the mandala - in a highly idiosyncratic manner, so that while it expresses his pro-

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[12] 'The Waste Land', ll. 301 - 302.

tagonist's achievement of transcendent reality, it symbolises simultaneously the decay and final dissolution of the personality and of the life force itself. The story is beautiful and moving, the ultimate dénouement disturbing in its implications. The 'Voices of Time' encapsulates, in a sense, the cumulative effect of Ballard's entire body of work.

Several strands run concurrently through 'The Voices of Time' (1981), yet all are linked to the over-riding theme of entropy and devolution. Dr Robert Powers, a neuro-surgeon, is afflicted by the 'narcoma syndrome', as are increasing numbers of other people who now sleep endlessly in specially-built facilities.

> ...in the silent dormitories behind the sealed shutters, the terminals slept their long dreamless sleep...the vanguard of a vast somnambulist army massing for its last march.
>
> (150)

Powers' sleeping hours are gradually increasing while, as a corollary, his daylight hours are dwindling. Soon he will enter the endless twilight of the narcoma victim. However, his shrinking life is the counter subject to an entropic countdown on a larger, cosmic scale. From somewhere in the vicinity of the star Canes Venatici, a series of decreasing mathematical progressions are being broadcast to Earth. Although the sequences of numbers contain over fifty million digits and will take an immeasurable length of time before they finally run down to zero, this is, in essence, a cosmic countdown. The moment at which the final zero is transmitted will signal the final moment in the life of the universe.

Powers, intensely aware of his shrinking life, becomes aware also that he is a microcosmic reflection of entropy on an immense scale, an intrinsic part of the cosmic process of

devolution. His ex-patient Kaldren explains the diminishing mathematical progressions to him thus:

> 'These are the voices of time, and they're all saying goodbye to you. Think of yourself in a wider context. Every particle in your body, every grain of sand, every galaxy carries the same signature...you know what the real time is now, so what does the rest matter? There's no need to go on looking at the clock.'
>
> (172)

Linking the countdown of personal and cosmic time is a singular visual image, that of a gigantic mandala that Dr Powers begins to construct. This Jungian image of wholeness and perfection takes on an idiosyncratic meaning as it is handled by Ballard's unique sensibility. The story opens, in fact, with a view of a ruined mandala that had been built by the biologist Whitby before his death. As is typical of Ballard, the scene is delineated with surreal precision, introducing some of his most prevalent images:

> Later Powers often thought of Whitby, and the strange grooves the biologist had cut, apparantly at random, all over the floor of the empty swimming pool. An inch deep and twenty feet long, interlocking to form an elaborate ideogram like a Chinese character, they had taken him all summer to complete, and he had obviously thought about little else, working away tirelessly through the long desert afternoons. Powers had watched him from his office window at the far end of the neurology wing, carefully marking out his pegs and string, carrying away the cement chips in a small canvas bucket. After Whitby's suicide no one had bothered about the grooves, but Powers often borrowed the supervisor's key and let himself into the disused pool, and would look down at the labyrinth of mouldering gulleys, half-filled with water leaking in from the chlorinator, an enigma now past any solution.
>
> (144)

This opening paragraph is typically Ballardian, setting up a melancholy and somewhat alien stream of associations. The 'empty swimming pool', like the 'strange grooves', 'apparantly at random', suggests futility. The mandala itself, which should be a symbol of numinous completion, is abandoned, half-finished and mouldering, a picture of stasis and despair. As an 'enigma now past any solution' it seems to be pointless, a blind alley along which Whitby stumbles until his final despairing act.

All these images become applicable to Dr Robert Powers, as he succumbs to the relentless diminishment of his waking hours. He too experiences an overpowering urge to construct a mandala - this time on a disused weapons range, using a giant target bull as his central point. Powers works in a sort of obsessive somnambulistic dream, a state of suspended consciousness, seemingly unaware of what he is doing despite his failing strength and the intense physical effort involved. When the mandala is finally completed, Powers has, in effect, reached his own moment of completion. Standing at night within the mandala, he 'hears' the 'time-song' of the far-distant galaxies, the 'ancient' voices of the stars. As he moves towards the centre of the mandala, a point which symbolises the core of existence, he hears the 'great voice' of Canes Venatici:

> ...Powers knew that its source was the source of the cosmos itself. As it passed him, he felt its massive magnetic pull, let himself be drawn into it, borne gently on its powerful back. Quietly it carried him away, and he rotated slowly, facing the direction of the tide. Around him the outlines of the hills and the lake had faded, but the image of the mandala, like a cosmic clock, remained fixed before his eyes, illuminating the broad surface of the stream. Watching it constantly he felt his body gradually dissolving, its physical dimensions melting into the vast continuum of the current,

> which bore him out into the centre of the great channel sweeping him onwards, beyond hope but at last at rest, down the broadening reaches of the river of eternity.
>
> (177 - 178)

Here, the archetypal symbol of growth and self-realisation, of 'at-one-ment', becomes transformed, inverted and subtly distorted, by Ballard's very personal interpretation of the Jungian symbology. Powers' death at the centre of the mandala becomes the climactic and transcendent moment, the moment where he is absorbed into the cosmos, into eternity. Here the image of the mandala mingles with another, that of 'Cosmic Man', an archetypal symbol represented most clearly, perhaps, by Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a man standing with arms and legs splayed, to form the nucleus and outward-radiating spokes of a perfect circle. This symbol of perfection and wholeness expresses the totality of man, his unconscious and conscious knowledge, and shows diagramatically how man interacts with and extends into the cosmos, learning to know himself and the world around him. Ballard here achieves a lovely vision, combining these complex concepts into a composite image as Powers is swept away by the time song of the cosmos. At the same time, the images are interpreted in a highly individual, even perverse, way. For, in a strange reversal, where the archetypal image would normally suggest growth, in Ballard there is only dissolution. In Jungian terms, the symbol suggests the power of the life force. But in 'The Voices of Time' the transcendent moment brings extinction - a 'dissolving' and a 'melting' as Powers' life is swept away. Yet, so intense is the writer's commitment to the terms of his strange reality, that there is an ironic logic to his idiosyncratic reading of what he calls 'fulfilment'. Gregory Stephenson says of these Ballardian 'heroes' that '...in the end they achieve the courage of their compulsions and find fulfilment in surrender to the forces of the unconscious' (1991:151).

Helen Gardner (1959:716) has pointed out that one of the problems associated with the interpretation of surrealist art is the fact that the symbols amd images arise out of the intensely personal psychic experiences of the artist. They can, therefore, be somewhat hermetic, unintelligible to the viewer or to the reader. The challenge for the artist is to find, within this private and oneiric iconography, common symbols that balance the personal and the universal. At its best, Ballard's writing succeeds in doing this. His images constantly evoke resonances in the mind of the reader. And, despite their ambiguity, they function powerfully, in part because of their age-old meanings and associations, in part because of the intense and meticulous quality of his prose and, finally, because of the writer's unshakeable commitment to the strange destinies of his protagonists. Ballard, like many of the surrealist painters to whom he pays homage, has built up his own 'dictionary' of obsessively recurring images. Like the drooping and softened watches and body parts of Dali, the mournful and deserted perspectives and colonnades of De Chirico, or Ernst's human forms which metamorphose into plant or animal entities, Ballard's frozen and silent vistas constitute a distinctive vocabulary. These intensely personal images impart to his prose much of its unique flavour and its constant flow of ambiguous, tenuous and teasing associations. His landscapes constantly provoke the interior and mysterious world. In his writing, the outer world - the world made manifest - is forced to confront the latent, unconscious world. Thus, his images take on a larger significance, working profoundly within the consciousness of the reader to evoke powerful archetypal responses. Rather like poetry, or like myth itself, Ballard's inner and outer landscapes make sense before they are understood.

J. G. Ballard is not the only sf writer to work with images of entropy that are mythic or archetypal in their appeal - but he is certainly the one who does so with the most consis-

tency and, in my opinion, with the most power. Ballard is, in a sense, a monothematic writer, showing little variation within the range of his concern with his disintegrating inner and outer worlds. Even from a stylistic point of view, his early work seems as elegant, as concise and as perverse in flavour as does the later writing. From a technical point of view, there seems to have been - apart from the experiments when he was so closely associated with New Wave writing - little change. Although he has, over the years, refined and then redefined his primary concerns, it is almost possible to feel, after reading only a few of his novels and short stories, that one is familiar with his entire body of work. Yet, within this limited range that he has set for himself, his work is significant.

Aldiss's work, despite a constant return to the antagonism between growth and entropy, is far more varied from a thematic point of view - although this study has not been able to demonstrate this, dealing as it does, with only one of his books. But both these writers epitomise, in a sense, the disillusionment - or, at the very least, the ambivalence - with which twentieth-century man is learning to view scientific progress. Other writers have taken a jaundiced view of technological advances, seeing them as, at best, a mixed blessing, and demonstrating that, in the spheres of emotional and sociological development, the human race still has a long and arduous road to travel before it reaches maturity. But the writers discussed in this chapter have approached the problem of psychic evolution in highly personal ways, using archetypes of universal culture and experience to illuminate their individual vision of the potentiality for sterility and decay inherent in civilisation, and creating in the process a powerful statement about the human condition. Kroeber, in Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction, notes that sf is perhaps the genre most able to envisage the logical and tragic conclusion to humanity's existence. Furthermore, very perceptively, he points to the most disturbing aspects of evolutionary thinking:

> ...the true darkness implicit in evolutionary thinking is not that it implies humankind emerged from lower organisms, but that it must postulate man's transiency. Evolutionary thinking is frightening because it expands our capacity to imagine our inevitable natural doom. Only man, it has often been observed, imagines his own death. Perhaps only modern man has been able fully and exactly to imagine the natural extinction of his species. It is this awful power that science fiction taps.
>
> (Kroeber, 1988: 26)

Both Aldiss and Ballard appear to be have accepted this conclusion: both seem to suggest that the dignity of quiet acceptance might be preferable to the fevered and clamorous struggle for survival. In this, they would seem to accord with another aspect of Jungian philosophy. Jung accepted that death was the natural end of the life process and accepted, also, that this was the point towards which his own life was inexorably moving. Because he himself never lost the urge for discovery and for the unknown, his final years were both tranquil and productive. He was able to make emotional preparations and adjustments for this final voyage, and to embark upon it with a sense that he had completed his work, that he had explored the unconscious aspects of his mind and come to terms with its components. Aldiss and Ballard have, in a different sense, both had the courage to face precisely this ultimate and tragic destiny. Both manage to find, in the process, consolation and purpose in such endings, and both draw on the resonances of the mythic and archetypal symbol to convey with power and relevance their unique visions. Rather than finding this depressingly nihilistic, I contend that such readiness to envisage the destiny of our planet and our species is exhilarating and courageous. The fact that Aldiss and Ballard have achieved visions of beauty in the process testifies to the resilience of the human soul, rather than to its ineffectuality. It is in the contemplation of such strange dreams that the reader of sf may find true wonder and consolation.